

Who Votes in Latin America? A Test of Three Theoretical Perspectives*

Miguel Carreras
University of Pittsburgh Néstor Castañeda-Angarita
University of Pittsburgh

Forthcoming
Comparative Political Studies

Abstract

Previous studies of electoral participation in Latin America have focused on the political and institutional factors that influence country differences in the aggregate level of turnout. This paper provides a theoretical and empirical examination of the individual-level factors that have an impact on citizens' propensity to vote. We test three theoretical perspectives that have been used to explain electoral participation in industrialized democracies (voters' resources, voters' motivations, and mobilization networks). Using a series of logistic and hierarchical models, we demonstrate that the demographic characteristics of voters (age and education) and citizens' insertion in mobilizing networks (civic organizations and the working place) are strong predictors of electoral participation in Latin America. Our analysis also confirms the importance of contextual and institutional variables to explain turnout in the region.

1 Introduction

After thirty years of uninterrupted democratic rule in most Latin American countries, and despite the clear normative and political consequences of electoral participation (Lijphart, 1997; Pateman, 1976; Pitkin & Shumer, 1982), we still know very little about the factors that affect individuals' propensity to vote in Latin America. Of course, we are not the first scholars interested in turnout in Latin American countries. Over the

*We thank two anonymous reviewers, Steven Finkel, Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, Scott Morgenstern, Ignacio Arana, Cassilde Schwartz, Jennifer Piscopo, Ryan Carlin, and Markus Steinbrecher for useful comments and suggestions on previous drafts of this article.